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Did U.S. let Libyan exiles die?

Allies feared revealing spy code

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WASHINGTON — For at least six years, U.S., Israeli and other Western governments may have allowed Libyan exiles to be killed rather than sacrifice the secret that Western intelligence agencies had broken a simple code used by agents of Libyan leader Moammar Khadafy.

That is the conclusion of intelligence analysts who have reviewed information revealed since the United States last month acknowledged its ability to decipher the code.

"As long as the focus was on anti-Khadafy Libyans, we didn't like it but it wasn't any reason to send in the fleet," a U.S. analyst said. An Israeli analyst put it more bluntly: "Why expose our sources and methods for the sake of some Libyans?"

Top administration policy-makers have refused to comment, citing a need to protect intelligence sources and methods.

"We came up with incontrovertible evidence, but the cost of blabbing it was terribly high," a U.S. analyst said of Libya's involvement in the April 5 West Berlin discotheque attack, which was cited as justification for the subsequent U.S. air raid on Libya.

The analysts point out that most Libyan terrorist attacks against Western targets were foiled, while most assaults by Khadafy operatives on dissident Libyans abroad have succeeded.

For example, when Khadafy tried to airlift four plane-loads of arms to the Sandinista government in Nicaragua in 1983, Brazilian customs agents were alerted. The shipments, labeled medical supplies, were seized during a refueling stop in Brazil.

And when Mecca-bound Libyan "pilgrims" began smuggling arms into Saudi Arabia in 1984, Saudi police quickly caught on.

Also foiled were Libyan assassination plots against Egyptian Presidents Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, Jordan's King Hussein, Zaire's President Mobutu Sese Seko, Chad's President Hissine Habre, and, perhaps, President Reagan, the analysts said.

By contrast, 27 out of 32 assaults on Libyan exiles worldwide between 1980 and 1985 were successful, according to a U.S. State Department tabulation.

According to U.S. and Israeli sources, the Libyan code was simple. It would refer to a bombing as "a wedding" and a perpetrator as "officiating at the ceremony" and was so simple that "we sometimes missed it," said a well-placed Israeli official.

Since the April 15 U.S. air attack, Libya has replaced the code with an advanced cryptographic system purchased from a Swiss firm, according to a U.S. government terrorism specialist who asked not to be identified.

Once they no longer needed to conceal their knowledge of Libyan diplomatic links with terrorists, host governments sought to act before the plotters could strike, hide, regroup or be replaced.

The expulsion of Libyan diplomats across Europe has given the public a bonanza of previously secret information on how Libya's diplomatic corps, state-owned airline and other commercial activities have been used as covers for terrorists.

New Libyan links to extremists of the left and right also have come to light, along with indications that several countries have deliberately overlooked Libyan predations on their soil or provided terrorists safe harbor.

Eighty-five of an estimated 850 Libyan diplomats worldwide have been expelled since Vernon Walters, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d began briefing European allies in the weeks before and after the April 18 bombing on the Libyan Embassy intercepts.

Libya is "using its diplomatic representations in more than 35 countries to organize and support terrorism," Deputy Secretary of State John Whitehead told the House Foreign Affairs Committee last month.

Eavesdropping on Libya is said to have intensified in 1979 after Khadafy, in one of several moves against potential opponents, supplanted Libya's career diplomats with fervent, untrained loyalists. Many were Libyan students abroad, others were nominated by local People's Committees in Libya, which were formed to promote Khadafy's pan-Arabist so-

cialist revolution.

In February 1980, according to the Libyan news agency, JANA, Libyan Embassies, which had been renamed "People's Bureaus" a year earlier, were assigned to handle "the physical elimination of the enemies of the revolution." Assassinations and assaults on activist exiles followed almost immediately in London; Bonn, W. Germany; Rome; Athens, Greece, and Milan, Italy.

In June 1980, shortly after two Libyan dissidents had been gunned down, Musa Kusa, head of the People's Bureau in London, told a London Times reporter that his revolutionary committee had decided "to kill two more people" in Britain.

"I approve of this," he added.

In the wake of the West Berlin discotheque bombing, new details about a number of terrorist attacks underscored the involvement of Libyan diplomats.

The investigation of the discotheque bombing, for example, has turned up two Libyan diplomats assigned to East Berlin — Al-Amin Abdullah Al-Amin and Muhammad Yasir Chriadi — who had been implicated in Libyan exile murders in West Germany while serving as diplomats there, according to Manfred Ganschow, chief of the West Berlin anti-terrorist police.

On April 16, after the Walters visit on April 13 and 14th, Ganschow reported new evidence that a rocket-launched grenade fired by Red Army Faction leftists at U.S. Gen. Frederick J. Kroesen near Heidelberg in September 1981 had "passed through a Libyan People's Bureau" and that attackers of the French cultural center in West Berlin in August 1983, had received "logistical" help from the People's Bureau in East Berlin.

In the same week, Turkish police captured two Tunisian terrorists who said they had been hired by a Libyan diplomat in Istanbul to blow up the U.S. consulate, kill former U.S. Consul General Daniel Newberry and sabotage the Iraqi-Turkish oil pipeline. Ringleader Ben Amara told Turkish reporters that Libyan diplomats had promised to provide him with explosives.

On April 18, Turkish police arrested two fleeing Libyans outside a U.S. officers' mess in Ankara moments after they had thrown away a satchel containing six hand grenades, according to Turkish prosecutor Ulku Coskun. Again the plot's mastermind was said to be a Libyan with government connections — Mansur Uran, director of the state-

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owned Libyan Arab Airlines office in Istanbul.

Abd-al-Malik, head of the Istanbul People's Bureau, himself expelled from the United States in 1980 for allegedly intimidating Libyan students opposing Khadafy, denied reports linking him to the plot and dismissed as "ridiculous" assertions by Libyan exiles that he had been involved in attacks on Libyan dissidents in Western Europe.

A 1985 Italian case against two former Libyan diplomats has been reopened, based on evidence from embassy eavesdropping. The two Libyans were charged with providing a .380 Walther automatic pistol to a third Libyan intent on assassinating the U.S., Egyptian and Saudi ambassadors to Rome.

One of the diplomats, Arebi Mohammed Fituri, was expelled from Italy in 1985, after the arrest of the would-be assassin, a self-described CIA operative named Rageb Ham-mouda Daghigh. Fituri's alleged co-conspirator, Mussbah Mahmud Werfalli, left Rome in April, untouched by Italian authorities, and recently surfaced in Malta's People's Bureau.

Embarrassed Italian officials disclosed April 20 that Fituri had returned to Italy to work for the Libyan Arab Foreign Investment Co. in Rome, owners of about 15 percent of Fiat, Italy's most important industrial company.

New Libyan ties to right-wing extremists emerged in Madrid, Spain, last week with the expulsion of People's Bureau's acting chief, Saad Ismail. Spanish authorities say he arranged an illicit interview several months ago in Libya with Khadafy for Spanish Army Col. Carlos Meer de Rivera, a neo-fascist seeking Libyan financial support.

Ali Abdussalam Treiki, Libyan delegate to the United Nations and former foreign minister, interviewed last week in his gray, modern Manhattan office decorated with orchids, insists that People's Bureaus "normally function like any other diplomatic mission. ... I don't know any mission in the world, including the United States mission, whose role is not to get information or to spy. Certainly, we are very keen on the security of our country, like any embassy or mission in the world."

"As for espionage or assassinations, do you not think we can identify instances in which Americans have been involved in espionage or assassinations of heads of state, even to attacking Khadafy in his own house?"

An exile familiar with the diplomatic history of Khadafy's regime, who consented to an interview on the condition that he not be identified, said that in countries of importance to Libya, People's Bureau counselors "all belong to one of the secret services — military intelligence, foreign intelligence or the justice ministry."

The Central Committee of the Revolution, a panel of 30 to 35 leaders in Tripoli with direct access to Khadafy, guides the work of missions abroad, said the exile. People's Bureau officials "rotate frequently and if it's a job for two, they send six or seven and, always, a lot of money."

Because travel opportunities for Libyans are limited, "... every time you find a Libyan worth expelling, he's diplomatic or student or airline staff," explained Lisa Anderson, a Libyan specialist at Columbia University. "There isn't any other cover available to them."

For espionage and dissident control, diplomatic cover is favored because it provides immunity from prosecution. "The greatest worry in an action is not losing an agent but having him captured and interrogated," said an Israeli terrorism analyst. "With diplomatic immunity, at the worst he is expelled."

Libya's oil-based economic clout helps, not just in Italy, Libya's chief Western trading partner, but in Greece, which depends on Libya for 15 percent to 20 percent of its oil and has never managed to arrest a Libyan terrorist despite heavy hit-squad activity in Athens.

Turkey has ousted no Libyan diplomats in connection with the recent bombing attempts. According to Turkish press accounts, People's Bureau chief al-Malik called Industry and Trade Minister Cahit Aral and applied economic pressure on Turkey, holder of \$600 million in overdue Libyan notes.